

# Transforming VR Service Delivery: A Strategic Model for Increasing Access & Removing Barriers

Promoting the Value Proposition of Vocational Rehabilitation

*October 21-23, 2024  
Seattle, Washington*

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

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**DISABILITY AND  
HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT  
COLLEGE OF  
APPLIED HEALTH  
SCIENCES**



# Centering the Voices of People with Disabilities, Families, and Our Partners (10:35 minutes)



# Workshop Presenters

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**Rooshey Hasnain**

Clinical Associate Professor &  
Community Engaged Project Director  
UIC, Asian, Hispanic-Serving and  
Minority-Serving Institution



**Francisco Alvarado**

Hispanic Employment Plan  
Coordinator Diversity & Inclusion  
Illinois Department of Central Management Services  
VR Policy Advisor

# Today's Agenda

## Background

- Part 1: Highlight our history of VR-centered work

## Introduction

- Part 2: Present VR disparities and inequities

## Context & Approach

- Part 3: Introduce our community engaged strategies via outreach and strategic partnerships

## Discussion

Part 4: Share impact of our collaborative and next steps

# Our Partnership Approach: Creating Collaborative Pathways to Equitable VR and Employment

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# CSAVR Strategic Priorities: Aligning Our Intersectional Work in Illinois to Advance VR Research and Advocacy

## **Increase public awareness of VR**

- We are partnering with diverse underserved, underrepresented communities, with a focus on Asian, immigrants and refugees.

## **Redesign and streamline internal processes**

- We are working to optimize VR access, navigation processes, and service delivery to address the cultural and linguistic diversity .

## **Recruit and retain staff**

- We are strengthening VR workforce diversity by creating pathways for bilingual/bicultural first generation college students and community leaders to enter the field.

# Adapting State VR Systems to Meet Changing Demographics

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- As the US population becomes increasingly more diverse ethnically, racially, and linguistically, so does the population of the disability community.
- Racial and ethnic minorities experience disproportionately high rates of disability compared to Whites, with Blacks and Latino communities overrepresented across disabilities.

## **Access Inequities**

- Research indicates that ethnic, racial, and linguistics disparities in access and use of VR services are well documented (Caldwell, Murthy, Hasnain et al, in press; Hasnain & Leung, 2010)

Based on these shifting demographics, more research-informed and practice-based working our VR system needs to be done on how to effectively serve and engage underserved individuals and communities about disability rights and employment rights..

# Race/Ethnicity & Prevalence of Disability in Working-Age Population (16-65)

(Disability Status Reports, Cornell University 2022)

RACE/ETHNICITY	% of disability in working age population
Whites	11.3%
Black/African American	14.1%
Asian	5.2%
Native Americans	15.8%
Hispanic/Latino	10.5%
Other	10.6%

US 2022

RACE/ETHNICITY	% of disability in working age population
Whites	9.6%
Black/African American	15.0%
Asian	4.1%
Native Americans	9.1%
Hispanic/Latino	8.5%
Other	8.9%

IL 2022



# Foundation of a Persistent Problem

## Cultural Diversity Initiative, a nationwide effort led by Bobbie Atkins in 1990s

- When Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, emphasizing employment as the primary goal of rehabilitation, the law stated”

**“Patterns of inequitable treatment of minorities have been documented in all major junctures of the vocational rehabilitation process. Three decades later, those patterns persist.”**

**From** <https://www.sdsu.edu/news/2023/11/sdsu-team-leads-national-effort-advance-equity-vocational-rehabilitation>

As a result, the need to understand and work effectively with persons with disabilities who are also members of underserved, marginalized, and cultural groups is increasingly necessary. (Lewis, Shamburger et al. 2006).

# Laying the Groundwork in 1990s: Original Research to Address Inequities in Service and Outcomes Experienced by Diverse Individuals in VR

Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation 26 (2007) 89–96  
IOS Press

## Section 21 of the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments and diversity articles

Allen N. Lewis\*, Aisha Shamburger, Colleen Head, Amy J. Armstrong and Steve L. West  
*Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Rehabilitation Counseling, PO Box 980330, Richmond, VI 23298-0330, USA*

Revised / Accepted July 2006

## Outreach and People with Disabilities from Diverse Cultures: A Review of the Literature

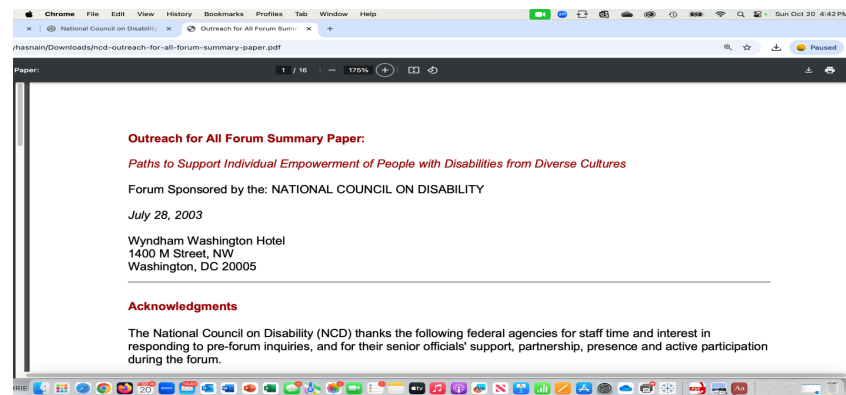


**National Council on Disability  
Cultural Diversity Initiative  
1331 F Street, NW, Suite 850  
Washington, DC 20004  
202-272-2004 Voice  
202-272-2074 TTY  
202-272-2022 Fax  
Lex Frieden, Chairperson  
November 20, 2003**

# LIFT EVERY VOICE

*Modernizing Disability Policies and Programs  
To Serve a Diverse Nation*

**NATIONAL COUNCIL  
ON DISABILITY  
December 1, 1999**



# The Importance of Section 21 of the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments

- Section 21 of the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments ([29 USC 718](#)) requires NIDILRR to set aside **?%** of its annual appropriations to address traditionally underserved populations.
- It focuses on research capacity building for minority entities, such as [Historically Black Colleges and Universities \(HBCUs\)](#), Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges and universities.
- These entities focus on improving understanding about the needs and outcomes of individuals with disabilities from traditionally underserved minority backgrounds.

<https://acl.gov/programs/disability-and-rehabilitation-research-program/section-21-program#:~:text=Section%2021%20of%20the%201992,to%20address%20traditionally%20underserved%20populations.>

# Specific Populations Facing VR Challenges (cont'd)

## **Latino/Hispanic populations**

- In the US, 16% of people with cognitive disabilities self-report to be of Hispanic ethnicity (US Census Bureau, FY 2020). However, among people with intellectual disabilities who received vocational rehabilitation services, only 11% (-5%) are Hispanic (N = 32,823, RSA911, FY2020). (Migliore & Shephard, 2022)

## **Native American populations**

- Experience disproportionately high rates of mental illnesses and/or other related disabilities compared to other racial groups; and therefore continue to experience significant disparities in access to VR services and have poor employment outcomes (Salomi, Gere, & Shahab, 2024)/

# Specific Populations Facing VR Challenges

Despite legislative initiatives [such as Section 21 of the Rehabilitation Act, Section of 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and work-equity initiatives; disparities/inequities in vocational rehabilitation and employment for working-age people with disabilities persist across the United States.

(National Council of Disability, 1999; Lewis et al, 2006; Executive Order DEIA, 2024)

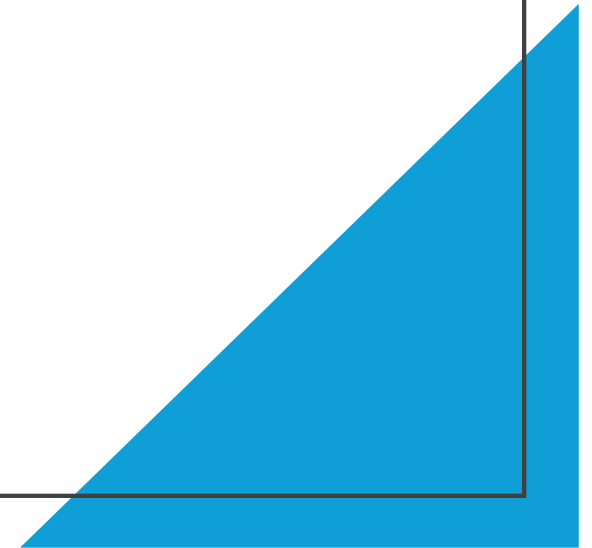
## **Asian Americans with disabilities (AAWD)**

- face low access and participation in VR system, especially if the data is disaggregated.  
(Hasnain, Fujiura et al, 2020, 2005; Hasnain & Leung, 2010)

## **Black populations**

- A study by Wilkerson and Penn (1938) revealed significantly lower rehabilitation rates among Black individuals compared to those in the general population (Shaewitz & Yin, 2021).

**So, Who Are  
Underserved  
Populations?**



# Understanding Common U.S. Terms Used in VR Research & Service Delivery

Ethnicity

Race

Minority

Indigenous

Native

# Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility (DEIA) in the Federal Workforce: **An Expanded Perspective**

The term “underserved communities” refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, who have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. In the context of the Federal workforce, this term includes individuals who belong to communities of color, such as Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and North African persons.

It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (LGBTQ+) persons); persons who face discrimination based on pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions; parents; and caregivers.

It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability; first-generation professionals or first generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration; persons who live in rural areas; veterans and military spouses; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination, or inequality. Individuals may belong to more than one underserved community and face intersecting barriers.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/06/25/executive-order-on-diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce/>



# Highlighting Current & Emerging Communities in the VR Space

**Immigrant:** someone who makes a conscious decision to leave their home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there

**Refugee:** a person forced to flee their home due to war, violence or persecution, and forced to seek safety in another country, usually without warning

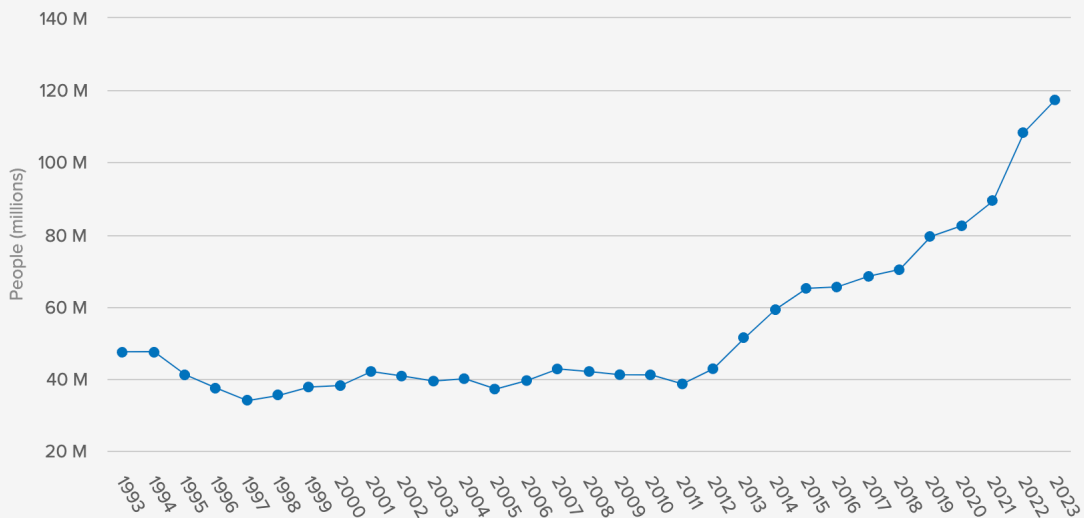
**Asylum Seeker:** someone who is seeking international protection from dangers in his or her home country, but whose claim for refugee status hasn't been determined legally

**Migrant:** a person who makes “a conscious decision to leave their country to seek a better life elsewhere” without the intention of settling down - usually for “economic reasons such as seasonal work

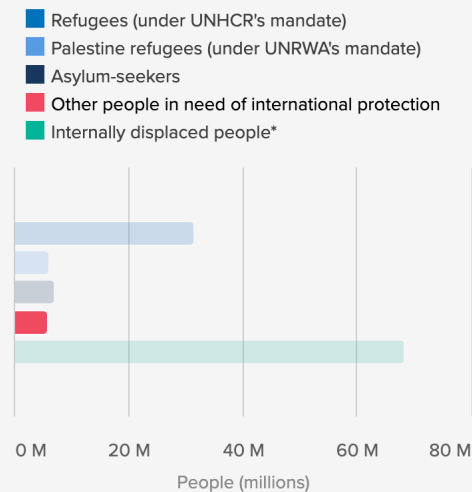


# 117.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced

at the end of 2023 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order.



13 June 2024  
Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2023



13 June 2024  
\* Some Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate in Gaza have also been internally displaced. In this graph, they have been included in both the figures for 'Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate' and 'Internally displaced people'.

**RESETTLEMENT TO THE U.S. IN FISCAL YEAR 2023**

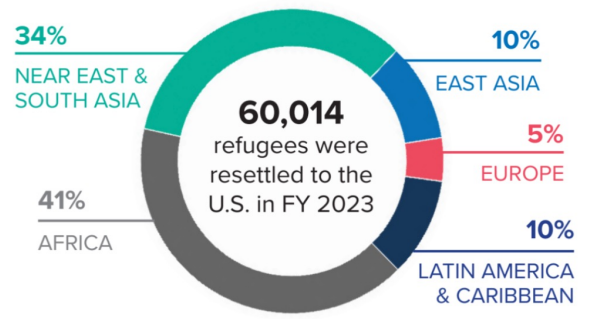
The United States has a long history of welcoming refugees and has historically been one of the largest refugee resettlement countries in the world. FY2023 data covers October 2022 - September 2023.

**TOP STATES FOR RESETTLEMENT**

1. Texas
2. New York
3. California
4. Pennsylvania
5. Arizona
6. North Carolina
7. Ohio
8. Kentucky
9. Michigan
10. Washington

47 states received refugees for resettlement

**REFUGEES RESETTLED TO THE U.S. BY REGION OF ORIGIN\***

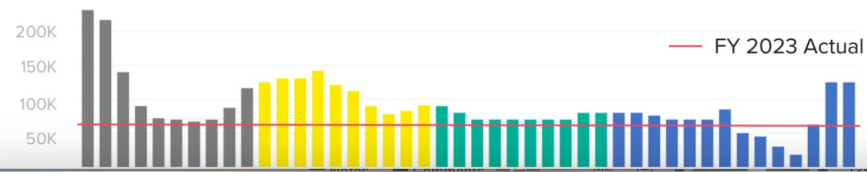


\*includes refugees resettled with and without UNHCR assistance

The U.S. government screens the refugee and decides whether to admit them for resettlement. This process includes:

- 8 U.S. government agencies
  - 5 Separate security databases
  - 6 Background checks
  - 2 In-person interviews
- ✓ If the refugee is approved, the State Department assigns the case to one of 10 U.S. NGOs or a private sponsor.
  - ✈ Travel arrangements are coordinated by the International Organization for Migration and partners.
  - 🏠 The NGO or private sponsor welcomes the refugee and helps them integrate and become economically self-sufficient in their new U.S. community.

**U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS CEILING**



**TOP COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR REFUGEES RESETTLED TO THE U.S.**

- 1 Democratic Republic of Congo
- 2 Syria
- 3 Afghanistan
- 4 Myanmar

Macintosh HD

Documents

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1-CSAVR 2024

Design La

# Resettled Refugees with Disabilities in the US: Historically underserved and under-researched in VR

Of these 117.3 million forcibly displaced, **43.4 million were refugees** - the largest recorded increase within a year; **6.9 million were asylum seekers**, and **5.8 other people in need of international protection** (a newly named category consisting mostly of Venezuelans displaced abroad)

- **Higher rates of disability** than other groups as a result of turbulent migrations, war injuries, and trauma
- **Unrecognized potential** to contribute to the workforce
- Often **channeled toward Social Security benefits** rather than into employment and career opportunities
- Lack of research/evidence on the VR and employment needs of refugees/asylees with disabilities in the U.S.



# Labor Force Participation Rates in US

People with and without disabilities  
(Ages 16-64)

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People With Disabilities:	<b>24.5%</b>
People without Disabilities:	<b>68.2%</b>

Office of Disability Employment Policy  
September 2024

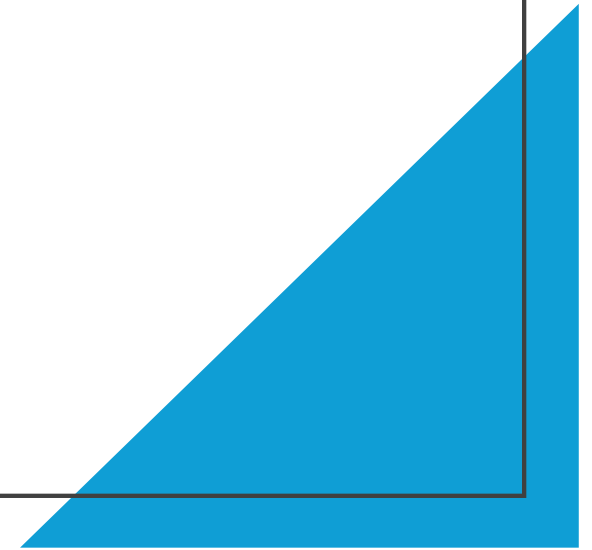
Question: Are these disability employment percentages inclusive of refugee, immigrants, and asylees?

# The Need to Engage and Collect VR Data on Immigrants, Refugees & Asylees with Disabilities

- This population receives inadequate attention regarding their VR and employment needs and capacities.
- The intersectionality of disability with refugee and asylee status has largely been overlooked.
- There is a significant gap in research on the lived experiences of refugees, immigrants, and asylees relating to disability and economic well-being.

To address these issues, we used a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to our partnership work.

# **Highlights of Our Community-VR-University Partnership Work**



# LEADERSHIP BEHIND SUPPORTING OUR STATEWIDE VR INITIATIVES IN ILLINOIS

## *A Special Thanks*

- Michelle Saddler, Illinois Department of Health and Human Services (IDHS)
- Grace Hou, Illinois Department of Health and Human Service (IDHS)
- Francisco Alvarado, Assistant Director of Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Robert Kilbury, Director of Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Dave Hansen, Director of Rehabilitation Services
- Lilian Jiménez, Illinois Welcoming Centers
- Rahnee Patrick, Director of Rehabilitation Services







Immigrant and Refugee Led Capacity  
Development Network of Illinois (IRLCDN)



Career Opportunities & Leadership  
(CO-LEAD) Council

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**Changing lives, diversifying perspectives, and advocating for those with disabilities**

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# Timeline of Our Partnership Work for Past 14 years

01

Asians with Disabilities Outreach Project Think Tank (ADOPT)  
2010-2015 (state VR funded); mixed funding 2016-present.

02

Partners of Refugee in Illinois  
Disability Employment (PRIDE)  
2016-2020

03

Immigrant and Refugee-Led Capacity  
Development Network: 2020-2021

04

Career Opportunities and  
Leadership Program  
2023-present

# Every Project Is Purposefully Designed To Be:

**Relationship-centered & partnership driven** in partnership with people with disabilities and families along with VR, and community partners.

**Targeted on capacity building and systems change**

Focuses on recognized and demonstrated gaps in access to VR services and employment and training to improve the economic status of individuals with disabilities.

**Culturally and linguistically appropriate**

Allows for strategies and service delivery are tailored to the unique needs of diverse clients

**Community-based, participatory, and collaborative**

Promotes open discussions that allow for the input of key stakeholders with and without disabilities from all sectors.

**Data and Research-informed**



Funded by the Illinois State VR System

# Asian Diversity: An Underserved and Misunderstood Group in VR

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**Population Growth:** More than about 24 million (5.4% of the total population) live in US presently; numbers are expected to increase to 48.6 million by 2060, and many live with disabilities.

- A significant percentage of Asians are first-generation immigrants (59% foreign-born), with varied migration patterns, immigration status, language differences, and levels of formal education.
- This diversity complicates the development of uniform services, requiring tailored outreach strategies.

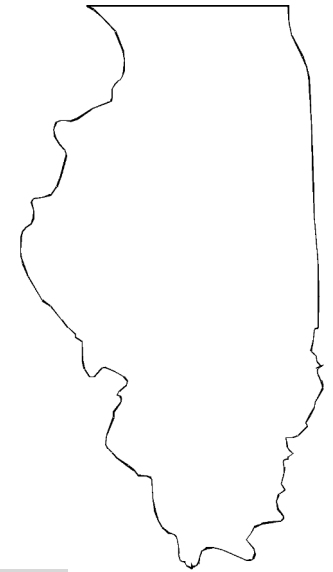
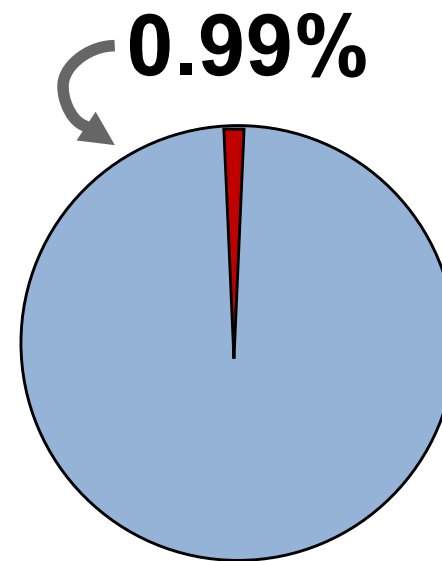
# Addressing Vocational Rehabilitation Disparities for AAWDs: Catalyzing Our Partnership Work

Fewer than .99% of Asian job seekers with disabilities used VR services in Illinois.

(Local VR and RSA data, 2004-2012)

This number *should* be **4 times higher at 4.1%.**

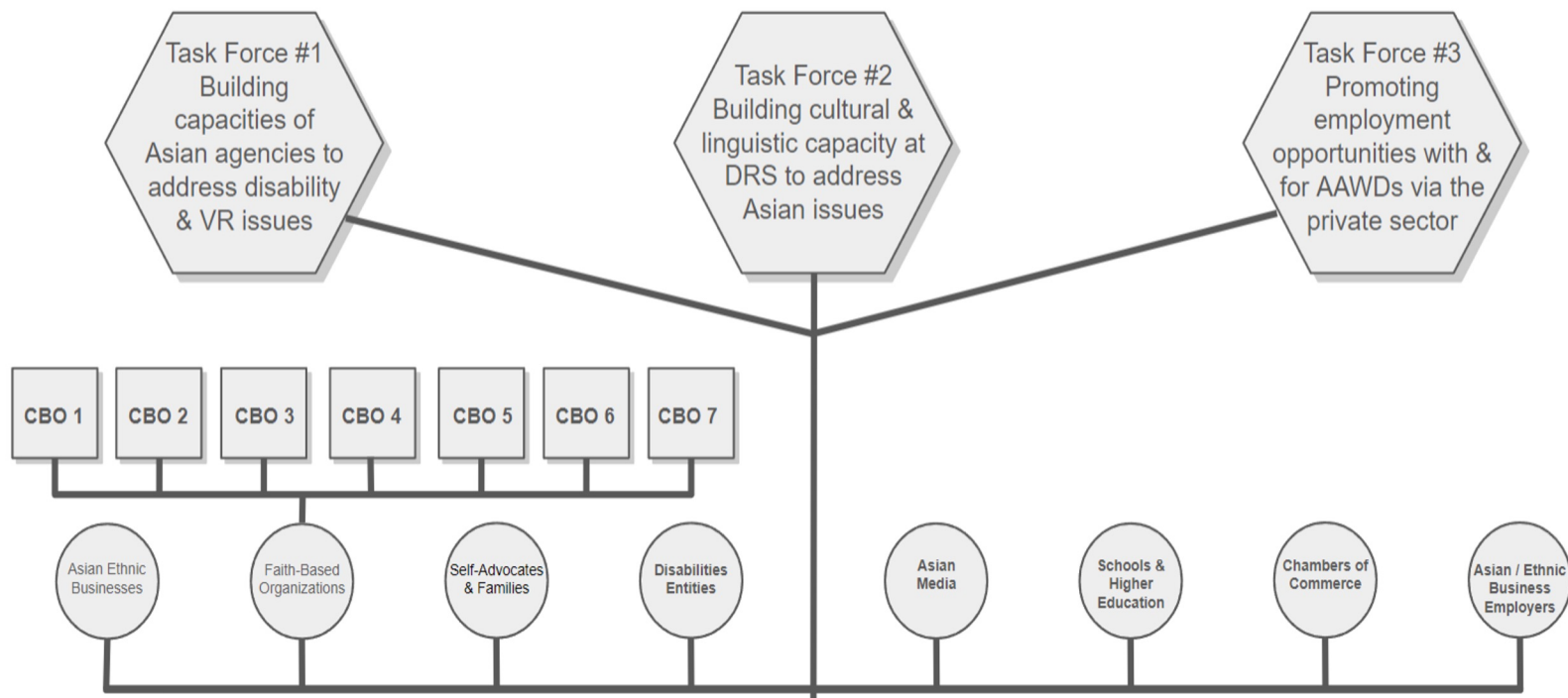
(Cornell Disability Report: Illinois, 2022)



Percentage of Asian customers served by state VR system (2004-2012)

# A Key Early Step to ADOPT's Partnership Approach: Develop a Project Advisory Board and Task Forces

## Asians with Disabilities Outreach Project Think-Tank (ADOPT)



# ADOPT's Goals

01

Connect AAWD to VR offices in their area.

02

Improve the quality of services and connections between AAWD and VR agencies.

03

Increase VR agencies capacity to assist more AAWD.

04

Decrease gap in employment rates among Asians and other minority communities.



## Multicultural Community Based Organizations (CBO): Bridging the Gap in VR

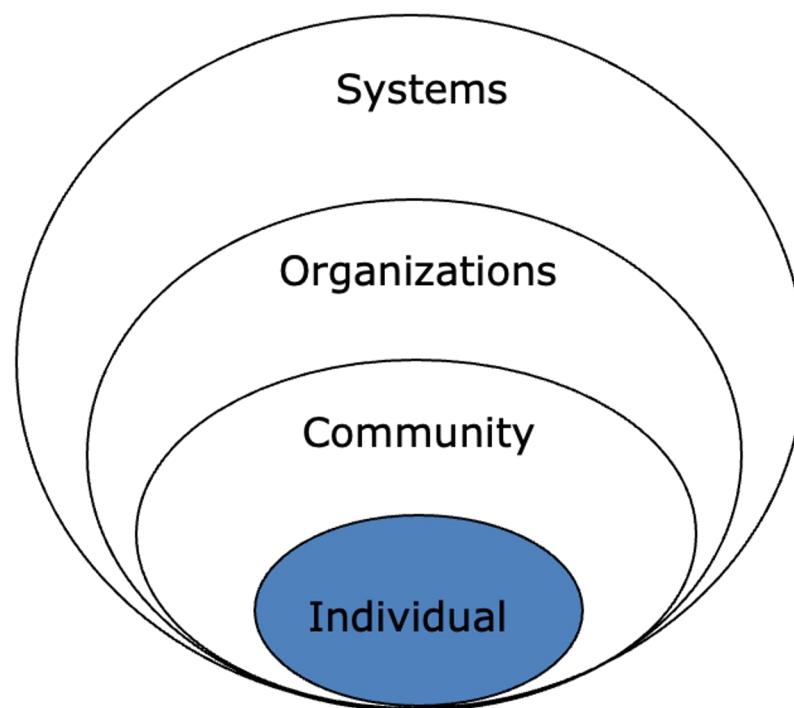
- Multicultural community-based organization (CBO) serve as one-stop social service centers, aiding clients who find it difficult to access or navigate government-led public services, including VR. Examples include [El Valor](#), [Asian Human Services](#), [Heartland Alliance Human Care Services](#), [Agents of Hope](#), etc.
- In Illinois, these CBOs are working with UIC and the state VR system to function as community rehabilitation providers (CRP), addressing the VR and employment gap effectively.
- For many VR clients, these nontraditional CRPs are the primary source of support that provide culturally and linguistically appropriate supports.



# Socio-Ecological Framework Helped Inform Our Outreach Approach

Motivated by the less than .99% VR disparity for Asian job seekers with disabilities, we began implementing a plan of action that was organized into an ecological framework that was divided into four complementary research methods:

- Individual
- Community
- Organizational
- Systems



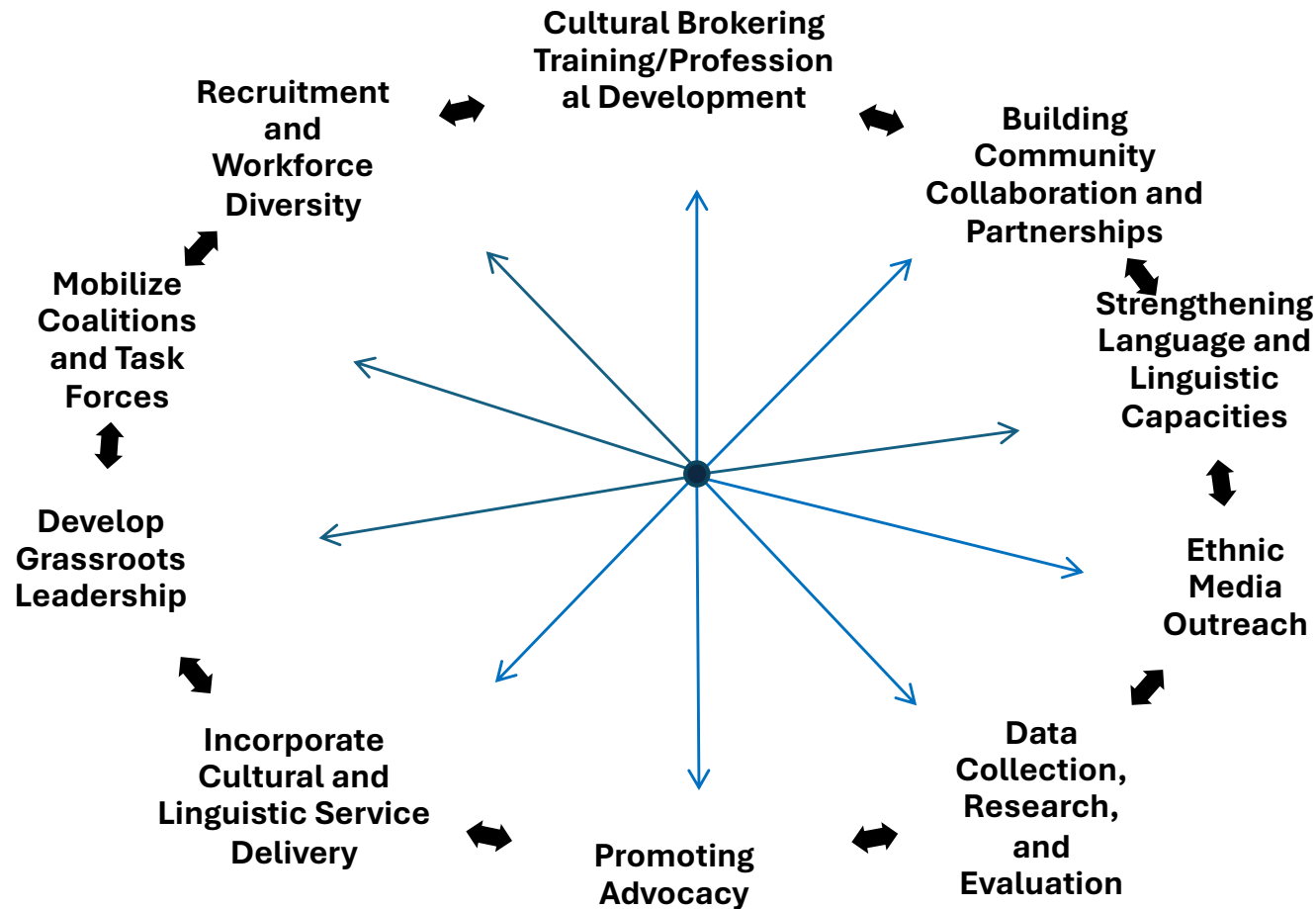
# Method 1. Focus Groups/Listening Involving Service Providers VR Providers and Asian CBO Providers

## QUESTION

What outreach strategies can minimize cultural barriers and maximize VR service access and participation of Asian job-seekers with disabilities?



# Emerging Outreach Strategies From Our Collective & Participatory Approach



# Strategic Approaches

## Used to Enhance VR Access, Participation, & Outcomes

- Collection of local practices and models
- Secondary analysis of local and RSA data
- Interviews with Asians, immigrants, refugees with disabilities
- Focus groups/listening sessions with VR leaders and counselors
- GIS mapping
- Language Access Survey



# Exploring Four Complementary Strategies to Promote DEIA Initiatives in a State VR System

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## **1. Mining Baseline Data To Understand the .99%**

- Data Source: RSA VR State Data from DRS, 2010-present

## **2. Qualitative Component**

- Focus groups/listening sessions with providers (VR and Asian) and businesses
- In-person interviews with AAWDs, refugees, and immigrants

## **3. Local Assessment to Help Frame the Need**

- GIS mapping

## **4. Quantitative Component**

- Online language access surveys with DRS-VR

# Approach 1: Local VR Data to Understand .99% client representation

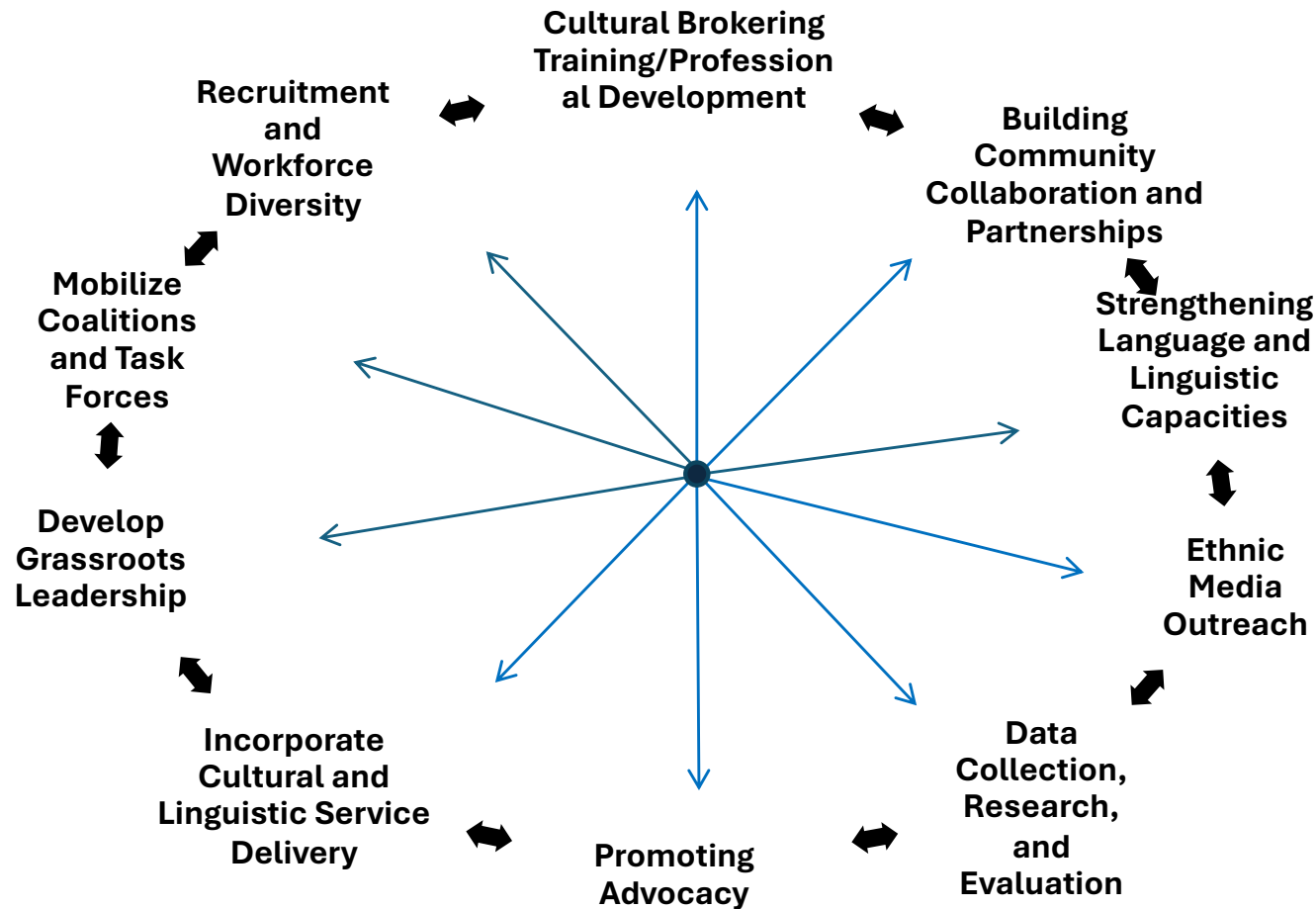
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## Question

What are the status outcomes for the .99% (n=1558) of VR clients doing within the state VR system?



# Emerging Outreach Strategies From Our Collective & Participatory Approach





# Methods Used To Evaluate Client-Level Outcomes

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## **Data Source: State VR Data Served as Baseline & Catalyst (2010-present)**

- Staff and administrators generate regular electronic case-management reports to monitor and track individual customer-level VR activities and employment outcomes

## **Data-sharing agreement**

- Developed between the state VR system and the university

## **Study subjects**

Total Customer Population: N=157,098

- Our Focus: Asian Customer Population: n=1,558 (1%)

## **Data analysis**

- Descriptive analysis used to analyze representation and status of rehabilitation services for Asians

## Baseline Population (8 years of VR data ) All Race-Specific VR Customer in the IL VR System

Race	Frequency	Percent
American Indian/Alaskan Native	313	0.2
Asian	1558	0.99
Black/African American	48131	30.64
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	187	0.12
Hispanic/Latino	12127	7.72
Multiracial	2365	1.51
White	92417	58.83
Total	157098	100
Frequency Missing = 30366		

# ANALYSIS OF VR STATUS OUTCOMES

**UIC** UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT CHICAGO

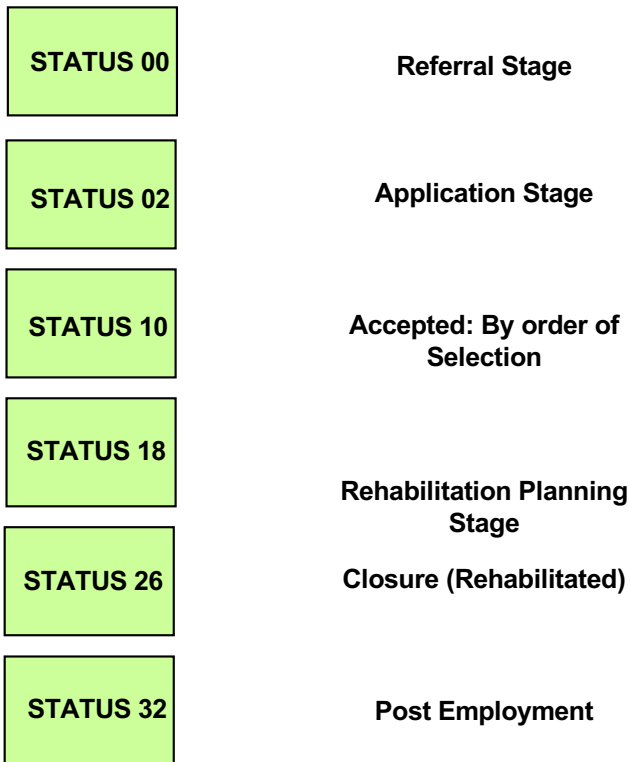


An assessment highlighting percentages of rehabilitated & non-rehabilitated People with Disabilities within the VR System

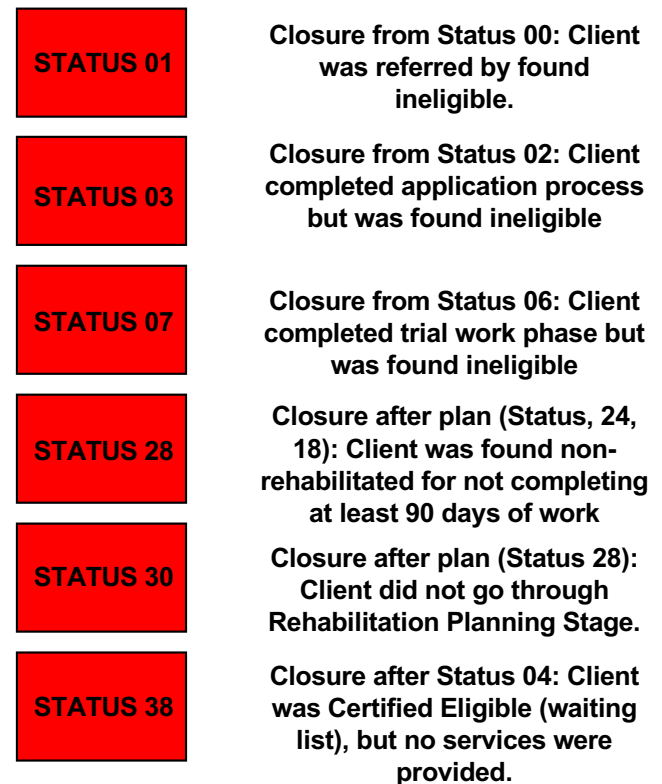
BACKGROUND  
OF VR  
SYSTEM

# Tracking Asian American Progression: Defining Outreach and Intervention Points for AAWD

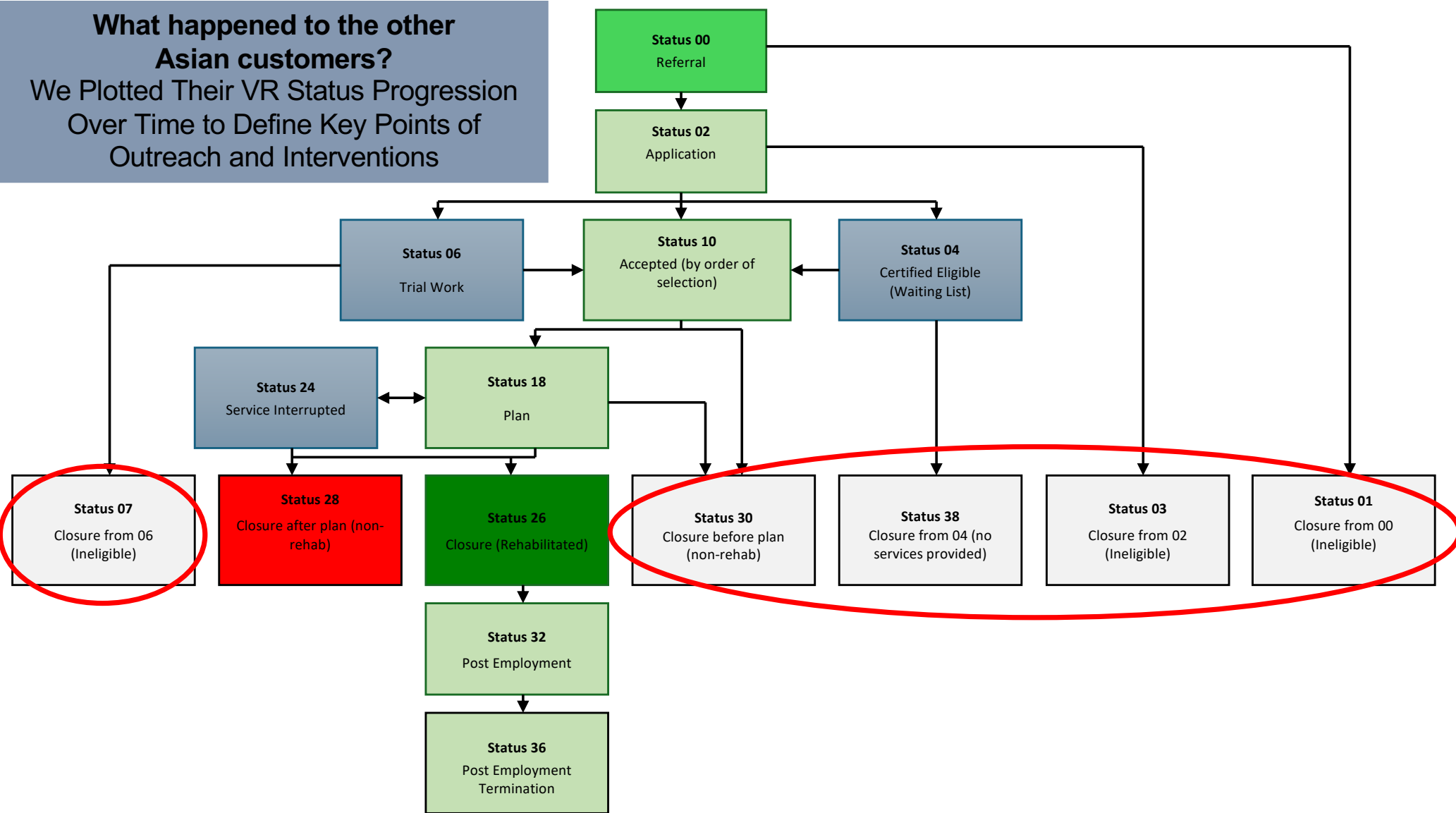
## SUCCESSFUL VR REHABILITATION PROCESS



## UNSUCCESSFUL VR REHABILITATION PROCESS



**What happened to the other Asian customers?**  
We Plotted Their VR Status Progression Over Time to Define Key Points of Outreach and Interventions



# Approach 2: Conducting listening sessions, focus groups, and interviews

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## Question

How can we effectively identify and address the barriers and challenges that underserved people with disabilities face in accessing VR?



# Identifying Barriers and Challenges Identified Through Listening Sessions and Interviews to Inform Our Outreach Efforts

**Mainstream disability services, including VR** have limited capacities in serving refugees and asylees, including Asians with disabilities

- Limited language access services
- Inadequate outreach
- Cultural gaps between service recipients and providers



**Refugee/immigrant/Asian serving agencies** have limited awareness and knowledge about VR-related services and resources

- Limited awareness of disability rights
- Inaccessible English-language and job training courses
- Referrals were limited to VR



**Refugees/asylees with disabilities have poor or limited VR and employment access and opportunities**

# **Approach 3:**

## **Mapping Diversity to Help Inform Our Interventions**

### **Question**

**How can GIS mapping assist VR leaders and administrators in identifying and assessing the need for new VR offices in diverse and underserved neighborhoods of greater Chicago?**





# GIS Mapping Helped VR Administrators Understand Community Needs and Assets in Chicago's Neighborhoods

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## **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

- Software that allows users to manage, analyze, and visually display geographic information and data.

**Study Area:** Chicago/Illinois

## **Data sources for GIS maps included:**

- U.S. Census Data (Chicago, Cook County, Illinois)
- Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services

## **Additional information collected included Asian and disability resources:**

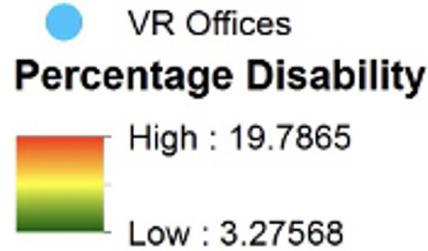
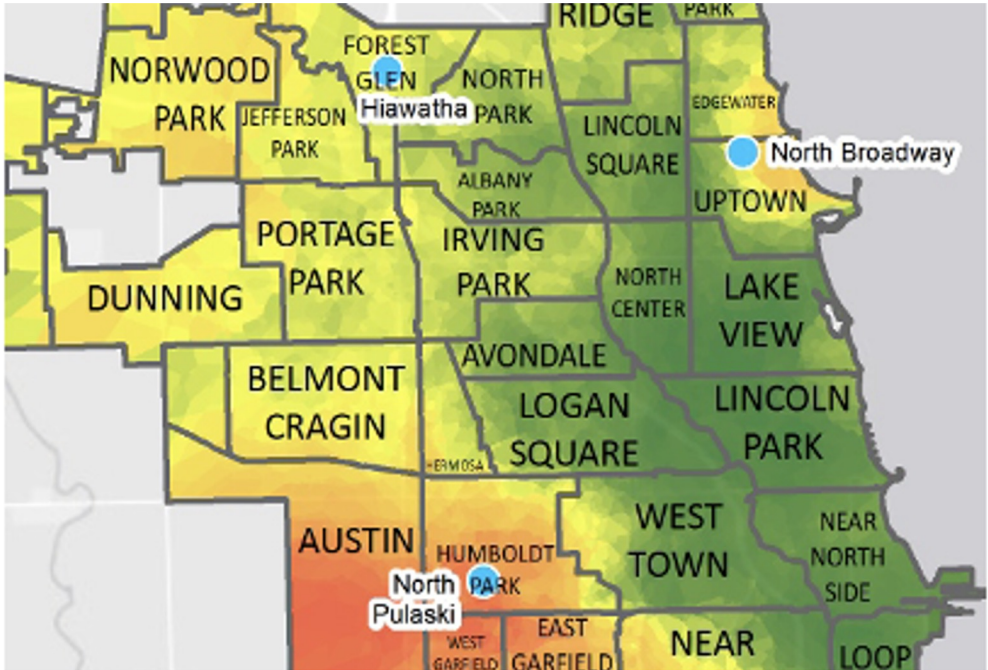
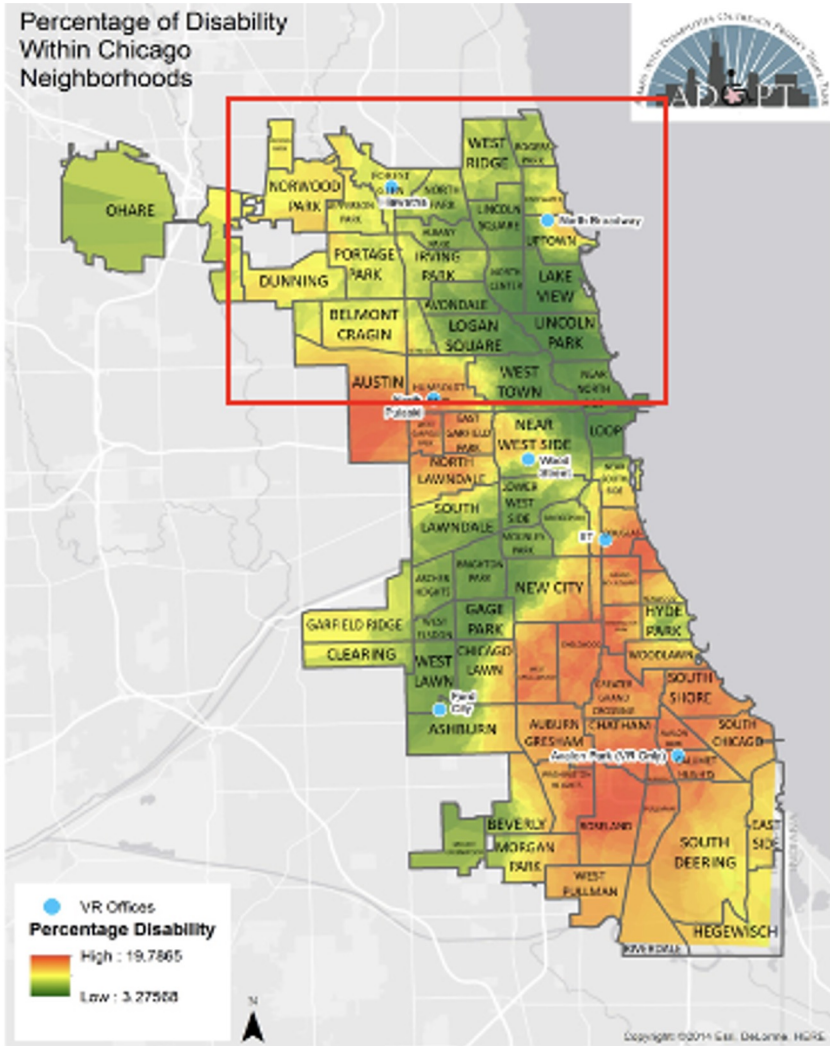
- Addresses and other mappable information for community-based organizations (CBOs), minority-owned businesses, VR offices

**Procedure:** U.S. Census Tracts Data were collected and downloaded into a CSV Excel file. **The Chicago**

**Community Areas Shapefile was downloaded from the City of Chicago's Data Portal.**

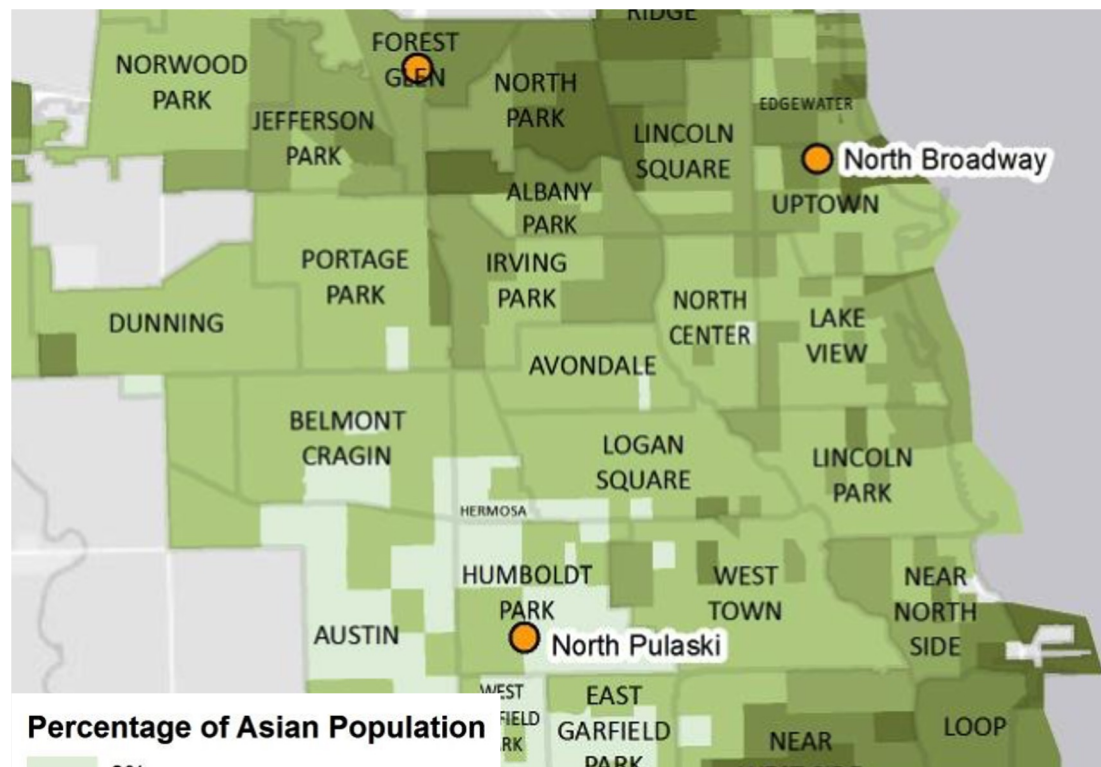
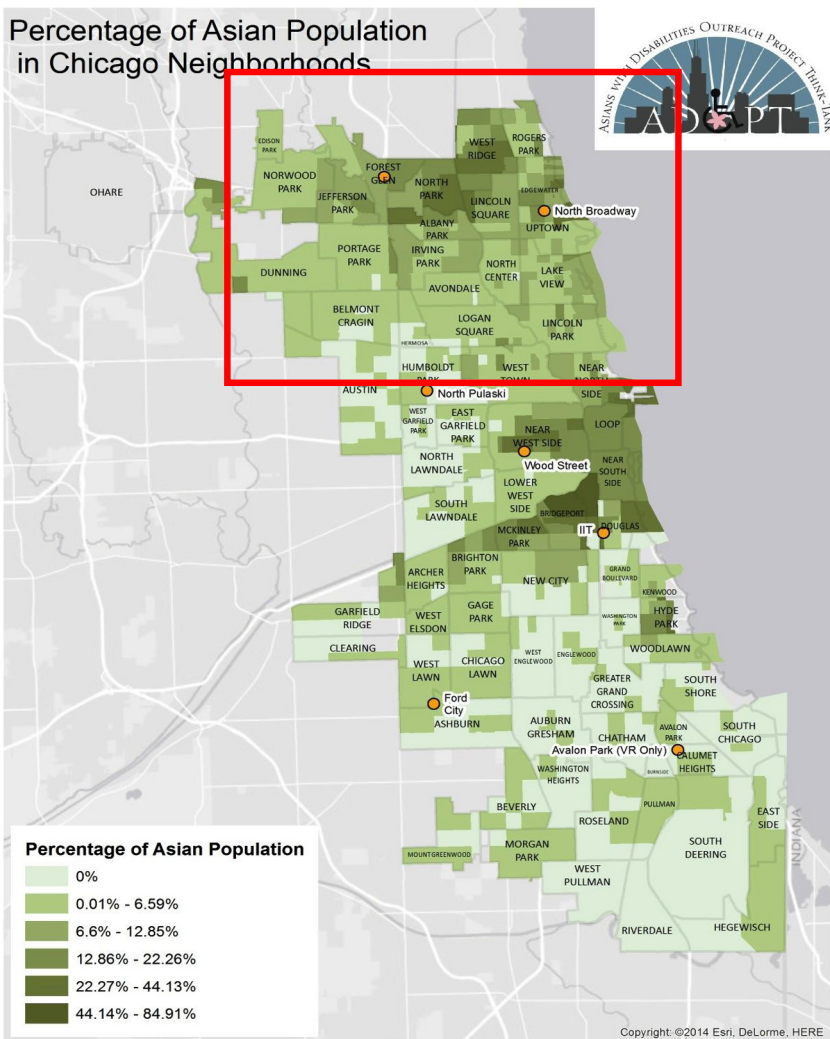
- GIS information collected was entered into the geodatabase using different geocoding methods.

# Project Spotlight: Uncovering Disability Concentrations in Greater Chicago



# Spotlight on Our Project Focus: Mapping Asian Communities in Greater Chicago

Percentage of Asian Population in Chicago Neighborhoods

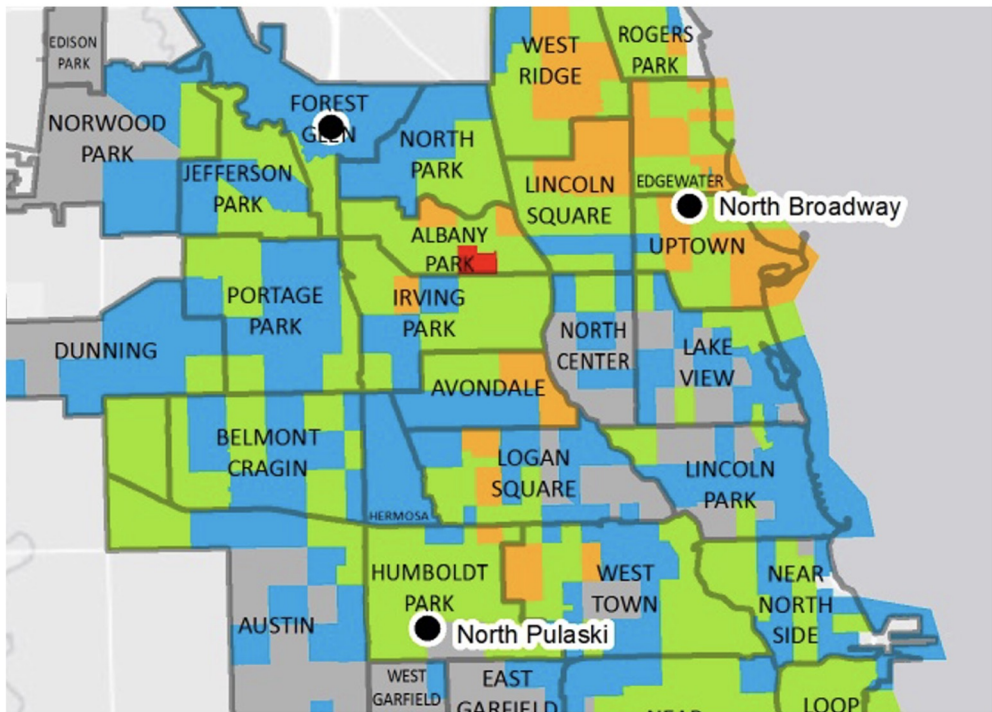
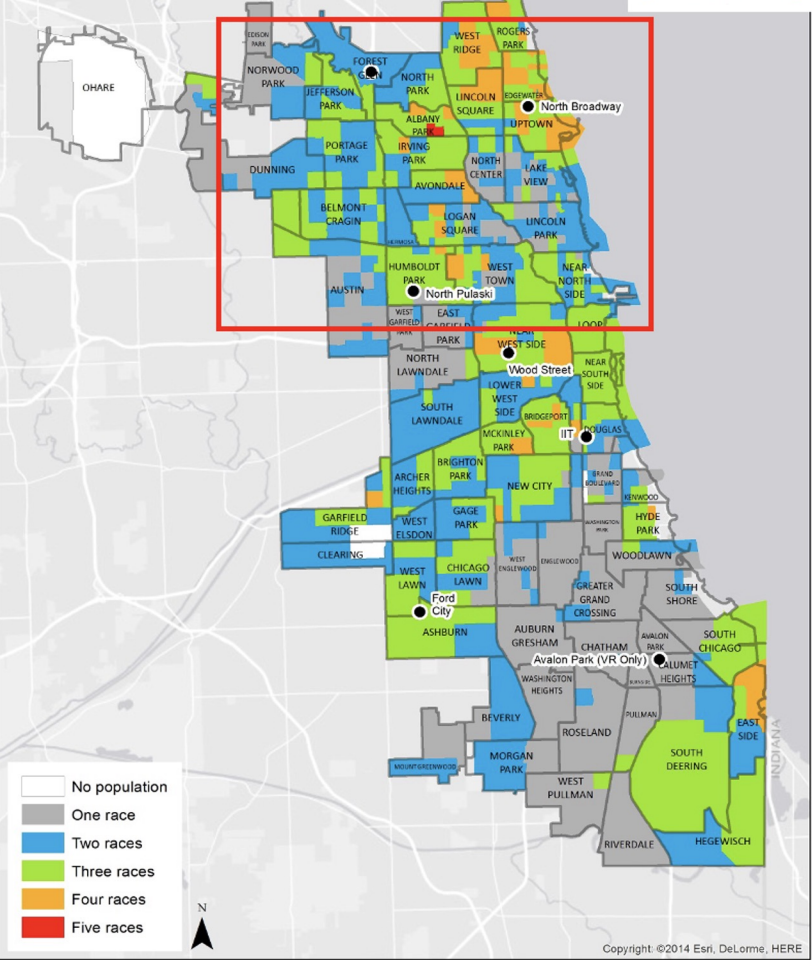


Percentage of Asian Population

- 0%
- 0.01% - 6.59%
- 6.6% - 12.85%
- 12.86% - 22.26%
- 22.27% - 44.13%
- 44.14% - 84.91%

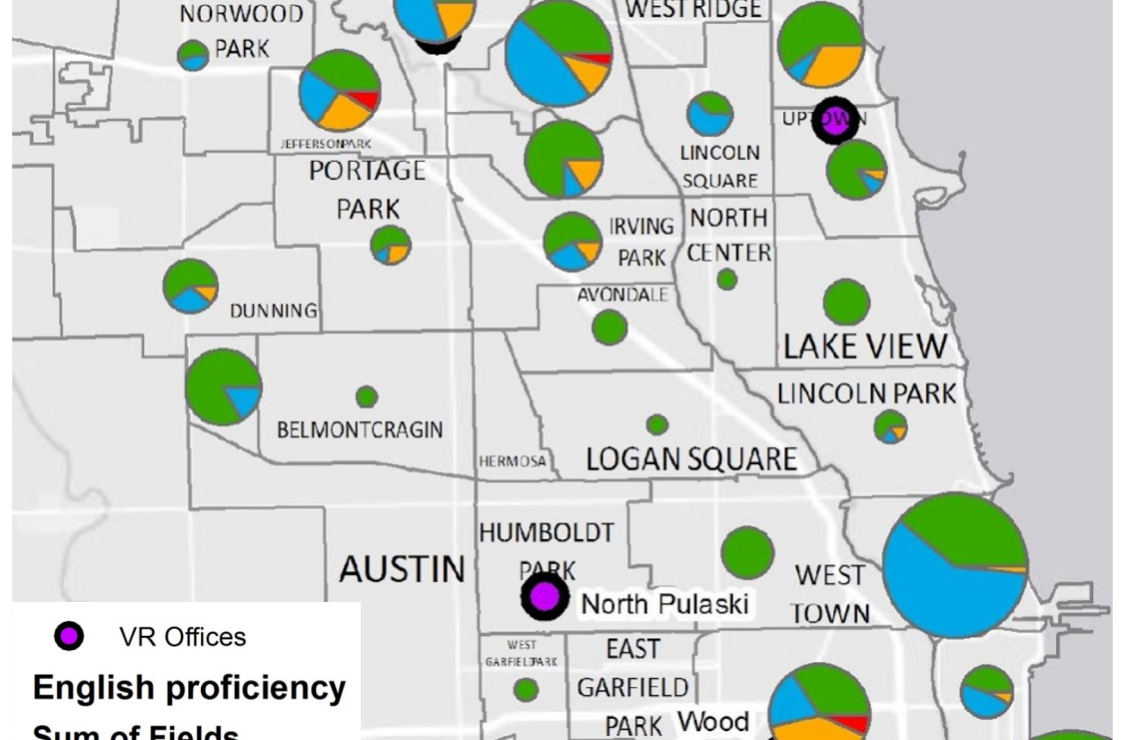
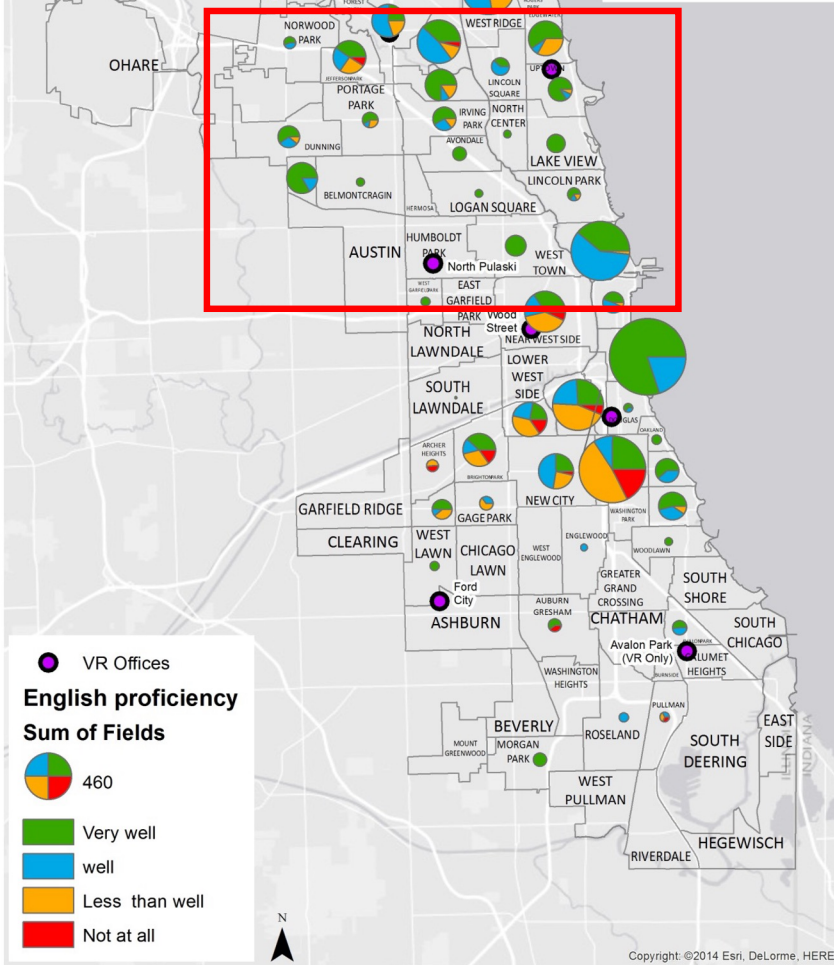
# Project Spotlight: Uncovering Racial-Ethnic Diversity Among Residents in Greater Chicago

Race and Ethnicity Diversity In Chicago Neighborhoods

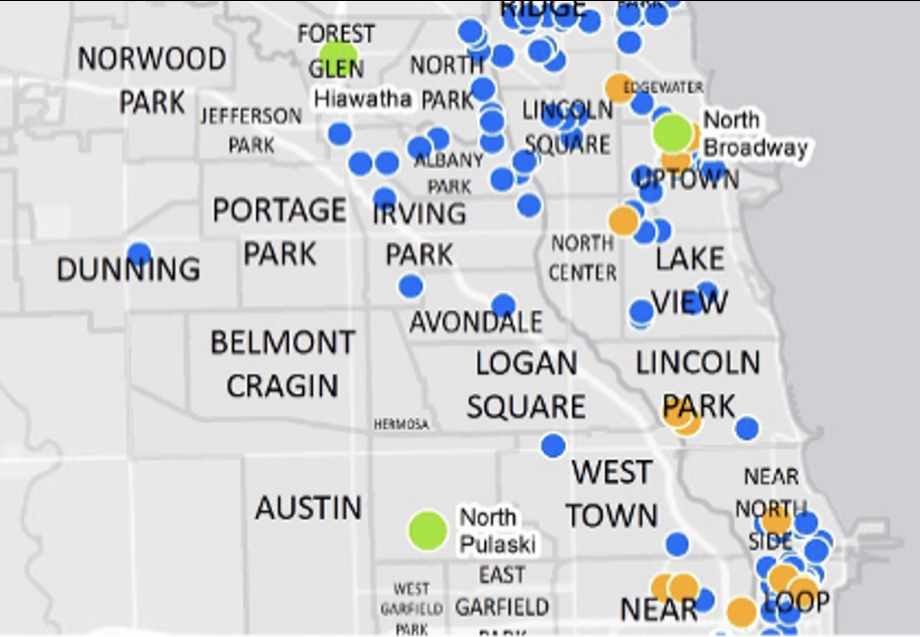


# Project Spotlight: Assessing English Language Proficiency Among Greater Chicago Residents

Asian Language Speakers  
In Chicago Neighborhoods



# Project Spotlight: mapping VR offices, Community Rehabilitation Providers & CBOs in Greater Chicago



- VR Offices
- CRP Vendors
- CBOs



***Impact:*** *New IDHS-DRS Office opens in the Northside of Chicago*

- Our advocacy efforts, guided by research and in collaboration with key partners revealed the need for a VR office in a neighborhood with a significant population of Asian residents and other underserved populations.

## **Approach 4: Administration of An Online Language Access Survey with VR Counselors/Staff**

### Question

How can a language access survey guide a state VR system in better supporting non-English speakers and clients with limited English proficiency (LEP) to enhance their overall employment outcomes?





# Language Access Surveys to Gather Baseline Information for Improving Access

## Development of the Surveys

- Reviewed literature and government reports pertaining language access
- Developed and revised survey content in partnership with advisory board members, including VR and CBO staff

## VR Survey Participants included:

- Staff and Counselors (n=265)
- Supervisors and Officials from VR office (n=59)
- Utilized UIC's web tools toolbox to create the accessible online surveys

## Materials/Protocols

- Language access survey for staff/counselors
- language access survey for supervisors and staff

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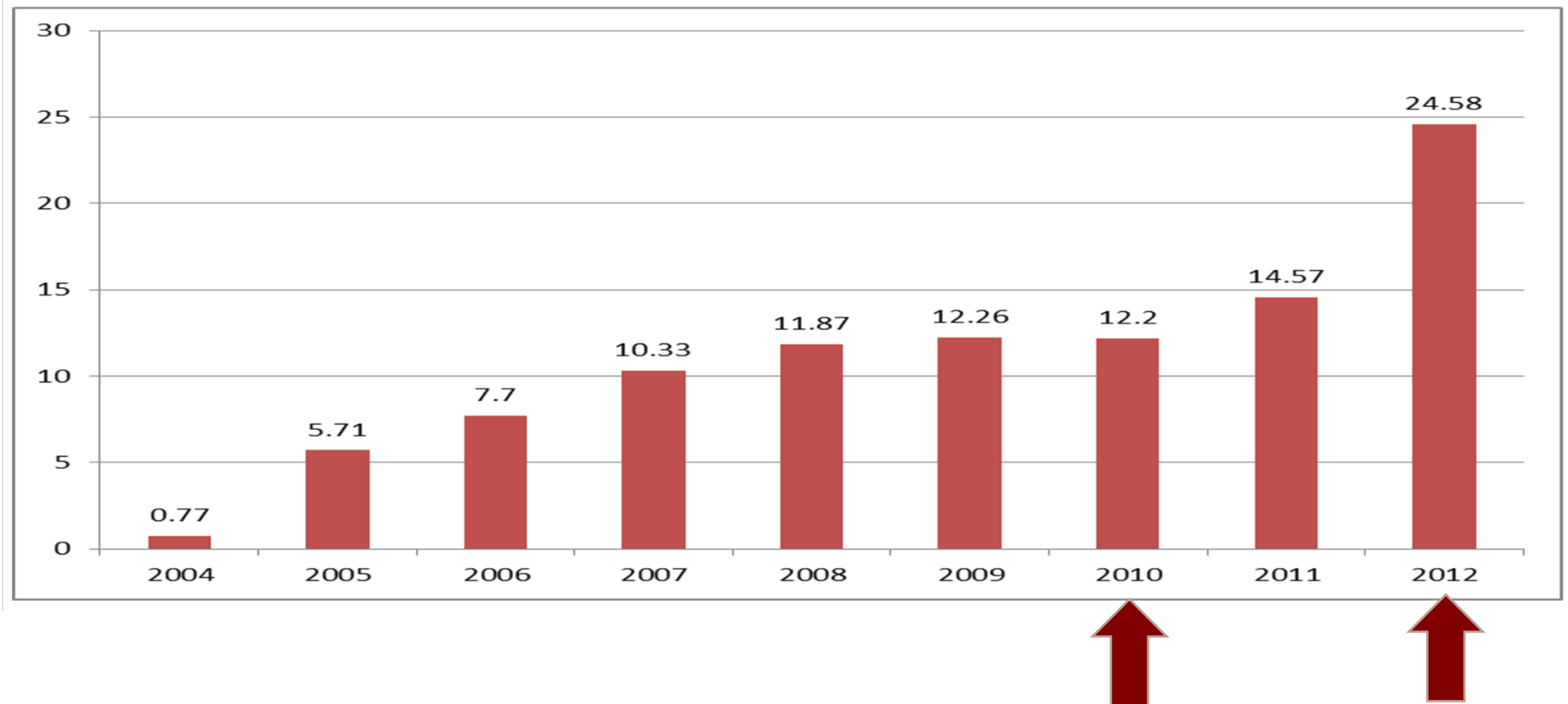
## CURRENT LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES &amp; POLICIES

QUESTION	YES	NO	NOT SURE
1. Are you aware of the official language access policies by DRS-VR?	98	105	61
1a. If you answered Yes, have you received some formal training on these policies?	26	70	21
2. Has DRS informed you of the procedures for requesting an interpreter?	159	54	51
3. Does DRS provide you with written policy on how to provide language access services?	98	55	111
3a. If you answered Yes, is a description of this policy made available to your office?	80	8	28

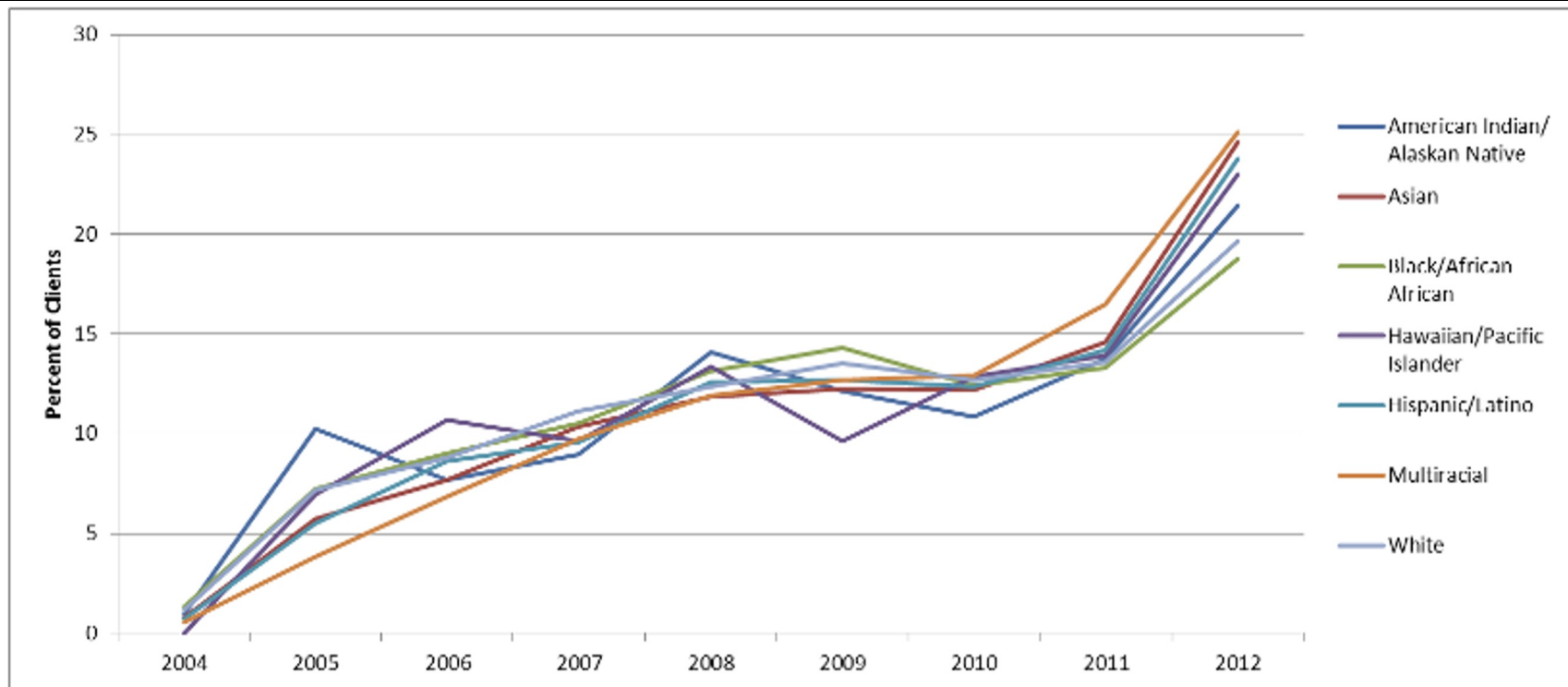
# **Impact of Our Collaborative Research and Implications**



# Percent of Last VR Case Visits among Asian American Customer Increased Post Study Intervention



# Percent of Last Case Visits Among Each VR Client By Race



# Introducing Our Outreach Model and Service Delivery Model: Insights to Our Work



**COMMUNITY and  
MULTICULTURAL  
VR PROVIDER**

**MULTICULTURAL  
COMMUNITIES**

**STATE  
VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION  
(VR)**

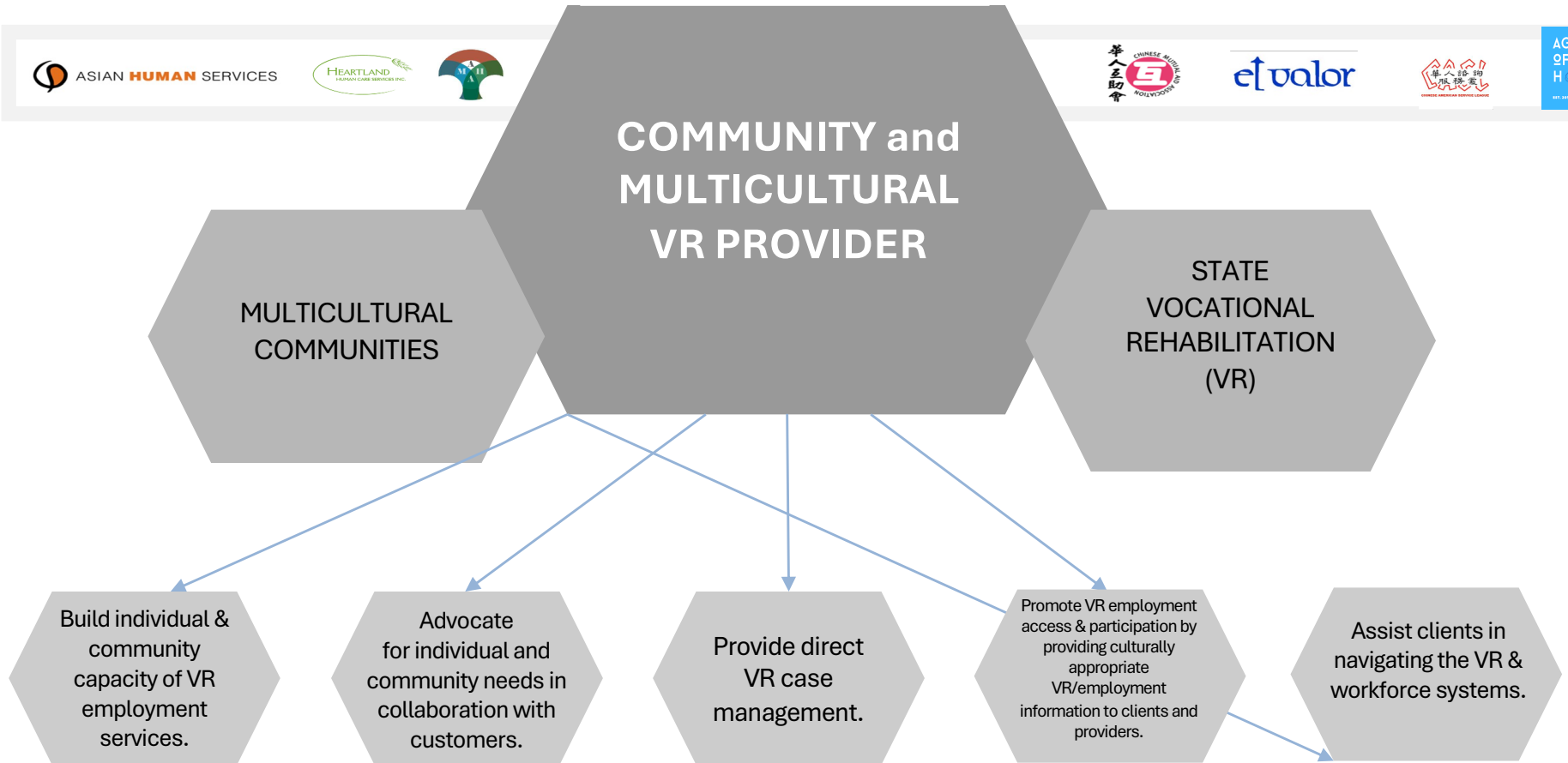
Build individual & community capacity of VR employment services.

Advocate for individual and community needs in collaboration with customers.

Provide direct VR case management.

Promote VR employment access & participation by providing culturally appropriate VR/employment information to clients and providers.

Assist clients in navigating the VR & workforce systems.



# Rehabilitation Outcomes for AAWD, 2010–2019

## Growth in AAWD Numbers

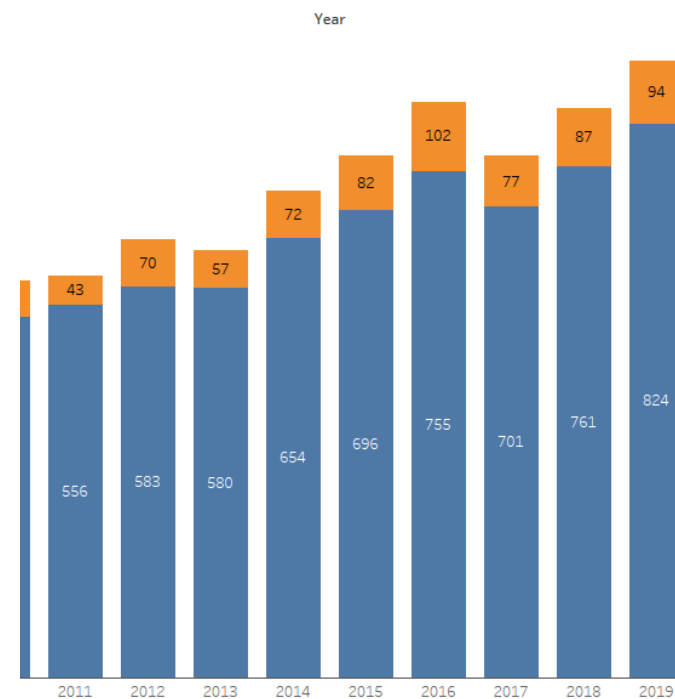
The VR client pool saw a significant increase in AAWDs from 2010 to 2019, highlighting the effectiveness of our outreach efforts.

## Sustainable partnerships

Ongoing community partnerships ensure that the model remains effective and adaptable to other diverse populations.

## Continued Impact

Even after formal funding ended, the outreach model continues to drive referrals and improve outcomes for AAWD in greater Chicagoland..



**Table:**

**Working-age AAWD (ages 21–64) in Illinois: VR Pre and Post Interventions**

Period	Phase	AAWD			AAWD in VR Avg % (% Growth Rate Rate)	Percentages Avg % If of Successful VR Outcomes		
		Year AAWD in VR placed in jobs						
ADOPT Development	1	2010 (official)	538	53	N/A	2.56% (2011 to 2013)	9.85%	9.85% (2010 to 2013)
	1 & 2	2011	556	43	3.35%		7.73%	
	2 & DF	2012	583	70	4.86%		12.01%	
	DF & 3	2013	580	57	(0.51%)		9.83%	
Post ADOPT implementation	3 & 4	2014	654	72	12.76%	6.22% (2014 to 2019)	11.01%	11.69% (2014 to 2019)
	4	2015	696	82	6.42%		11.78%	
		2016	755	102	8.48%		13.51%	
		2017	701	77	(7.15%)		10.98%	
		2018	761	87	8.56%		11.43%	
		2019	824	94	8.28%		11.41%	
COVID period		2020	827	82	0.36%	Out of Scope	9.92%	Out of Scope
		2021	823	59	(0.48%)		7.17%	

\*Missing data before 2009 is due to lack of details in DRS FY2009 report. ata for 2020 is missing because US Census did collect the data due to COVID-19.



# Future Steps:

## What are the potential implications of our discussion

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### **Key Findings:**

- All of our projects demonstrated the critical importance of culturally tailored outreach and community-based VR services to support the unique needs of underrepresented populations.

### **Implications for Future Research:**

- There is a need for continued research that looks at the internationality of ancestry, disability, and employment outcomes.
- State VR system adopts the model statewide, recognizing its sustainability and effectiveness.
- Our outreach and service delivery model can serve as a framework for other VR systems in other states.



Partners of Refugee in Illinois Disability Employment

NIDILRR-Funded Initiative

Figure 3: PRIDE Participants: Country of Origin



# ...Through Partnerships with Refugee & Disability Serving Agencies

- Utilizing participatory action research (PAR), PRIDE focused on engaging with **refugees/asylees with disabilities, families, communities, organizations, and systems** throughout the different phases of the project, (including its development, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination)
- PRIDE exposed refugees/asylees with disabilities to disability and human rights in this country by introducing to both the:
  - **Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities**
  - **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**
- Both aim to ensure people with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in mainstream life

## Educational Characteristics & Journey of PRIDE Participants

FACTORS (*ESL: English as a second language)		NUMBERS(N=51)	PERCENTAGE %
HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	Less Than High School	26	50.98
	Completed High School	7	13.7
	Greater Than High School	17	33

## Employment Characteristics & Journey of PRIDE Participants – Part A

FACTOR	NUMBERS (N=50)	PERCENTAGE(%)
INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT JOB TRAINING	45	90
CURRENTLY WORKING FOR PAY	19	38

## Sociodemographic Characteristics of PRIDE Participants

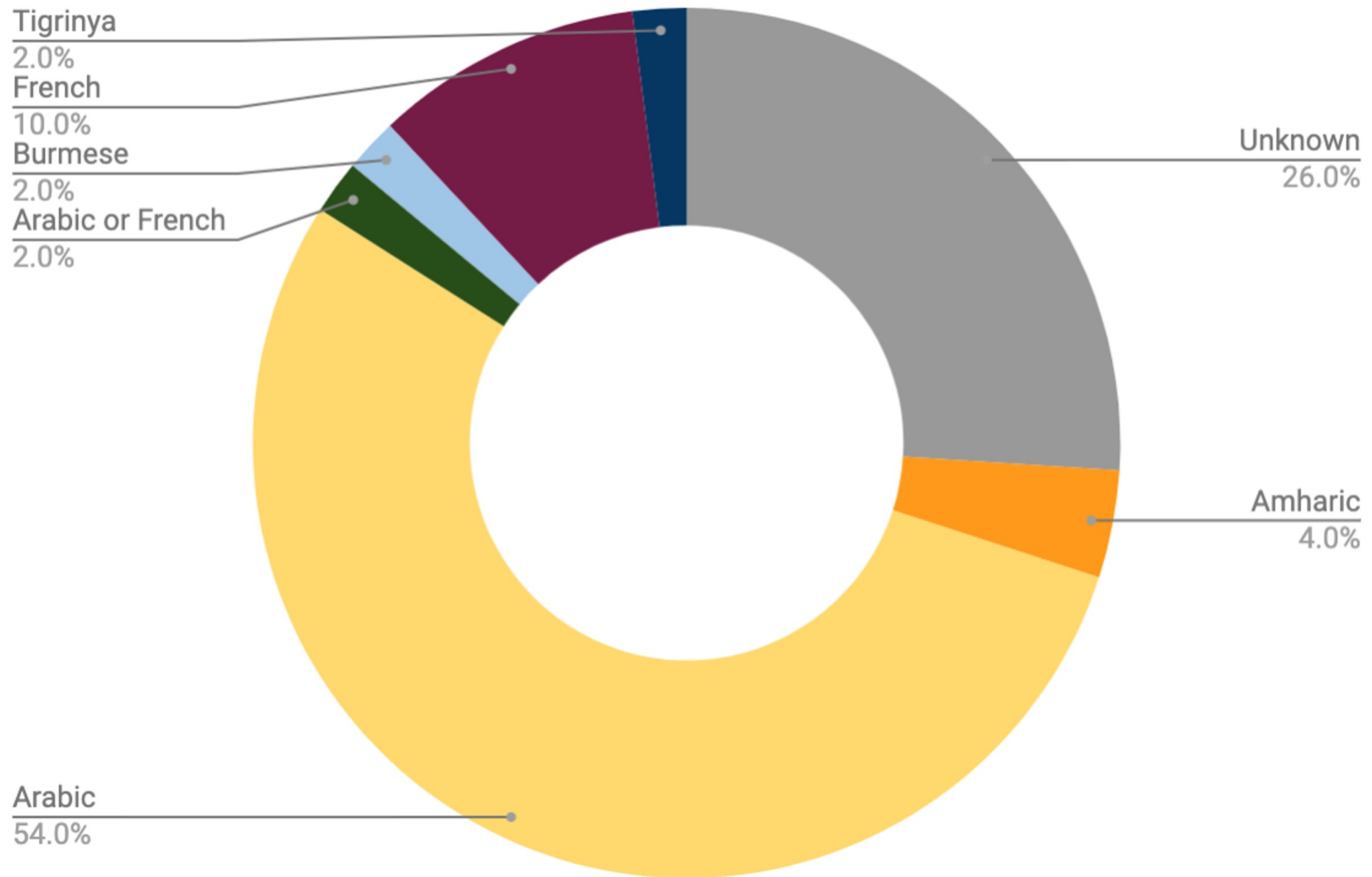
FACTORS-		NUMBERS(N=50 )	PERCENTAGE %
DISABILITY DIAGNOSIS	Mental Health	18	36
	Physical Health	31	62
	Sensory Health	13	26
	Intellectual Health	1	2
	Developmental Health	2	4
	Chronic Health	18	36
	Other Diagnosis	7	14
GENDER	Male	30	60
	Female	19	38
AGE: MEAN (SD)		40.3	
LENGTH OF TIME IN THE U.S.; MEAN (SD)		3 years 7 months	
MARITAL STATUS	Single (Never Married)	17	34
	Married	23	46
	Other	11	22
HAVE ANY CHILDREN	Yes	31	62
	Number Of Children: Mean	2	

## Employment Characteristics & Journey of PRIDE Participants – Part C

FACTOR	NUMBERS (N=50)	PERCENTAGE(%)
EVER OWNED A BUSINESS	24	48
INTERESTED IN SELF-EMPLOYMENT OR STARTING BUSINESS	40	80
EVER TRIED TO DEVELOP BUSINESS PLAN	6	12
INTERESTED IN ASSISTANCE TO DEVELOP BUSINESS PLAN	36	72
INTERESTED IN CLASSES TO DEVELOP BUSINESS PLAN	35	70
EVER TRIED TO GET FUNDING FOR BUSINESS	40	80
INTERESTED IN BUSINESS MENTOR	29	58
INTERESTED IN BUSINESS PARTNER	28	56
ALREADY HAVE A BUSINESS PARTNER	10	20



## Language spoken by Participants



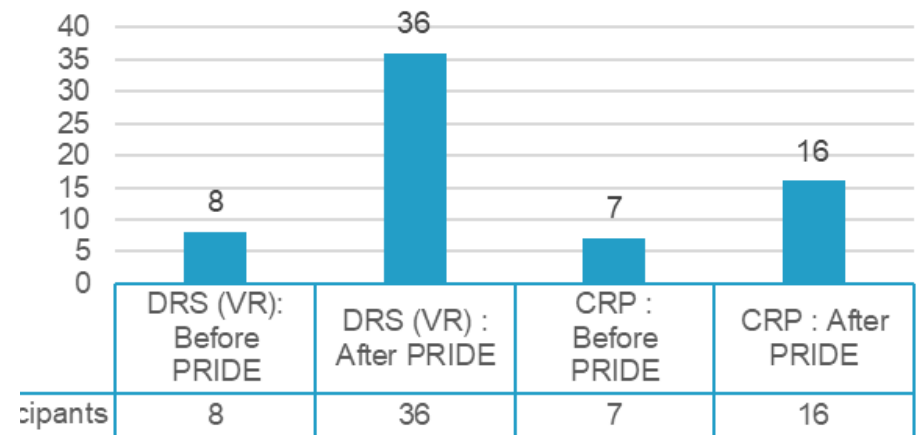


# PRIDE Participants and Increased VR Access and Advocacy

## Outcomes:

- Participants' knowledge pertaining to disability and employment-related resources and policies in the U.S. increased significantly from pre-intervention (mean = 6.8, sd = 2.5) to post-intervention (mean = 8.3, sd = 2.9),  $t(27) = -2.414$ ,  $p = 0.02$ .

## Access to Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment-Related Services



DRS (VR) : Department of Rehabilitation Services (Vocational Rehabilitation)  
CRP : Community Rehabilitation Provider

# Tedros Tekle Markos

Self Advocate  
*PRIDE & CO-LEAD* Associate  
Recent graduate of  
Rehabilitation Counseling  
program





Immigrant and Refugee Led Capacity  
Development Network of Illinois (IRLCDN)

...enable nonprofit community based  
organizations to better serve as disability  
inclusive welcoming centers across diverse  
regions of Illinois.

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Changing lives, diversifying perspectives, and advocating for those with  
disabilities

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# Our Most Recent Work Equity Initiative: CO-LEAD

-The Career Opportunities and Leadership (CO-LEAD) initiative is a solution-oriented council based in Illinois comprised of members with disabilities and partners.

-The Council is dedicated to addressing the employment gap experienced by people with disabilities who are from underrepresented minority backgrounds—including immigrants, refugees, and asylees.

-Through storytelling, resource sharing, and data driven visualizations, CO-LEAD plans to amplify the lived experiences of underrepresented voices in the context of disability employment.



Career Opportunities & Leadership  
(CO-LEAD) Council

# Contact Information

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**WORK FOR CMS:** [Link to CMS jobs](#)





“...help connect working-age Asian immigrants and refugees with disabilities to culturally competent vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs throughout the Chicago area.”



“Our goal is to develop, field-test and disseminate employment training and capacity-building programs to improve VR and employment options for refugees with disabilities in Illinois and elsewhere.”



Immigrant and Refugee Led Capacity  
Development Network of Illinois (IRLCDN)

“enable nonprofit community based organizations to better serve as disability inclusive welcoming centers across diverse regions of Illinois.”



“...dedicated to addressing the employment gap faced by people with disabilities who are from underrepresented minority backgrounds...”

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**Changing lives, diversifying perspectives, and advocating for those with disabilities**

## **Impact of Related Partnership Projects**